DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 422 653 EA 029 340

AUTHOR Slee, Roger
TITLE Student Action Research and School Discipline: Consulting the Experts in the Field.
PUB DATE 1998-04-00
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Diego, CA, April 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; *Discipline; Discipline Policy; Educational Policy; *Expulsion; Foreign Countries; Program Evaluation; Secondary Education; Student Behavior; Student Problems; Suspension
IDENTIFIERS *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Reports from the United Kingdom show increases in the rate of student suspensions and exclusions. An overview of how policy makers are addressing student problems is presented here. The report focuses on education policy makers' proclivity to address student disruption through exclusion from school. It is claimed that suspensions and other forms of exclusion are consistent with the Labor Government's "no-nonsense" approach to education, with much of the policy arising from a hearkening to earlier days of schooling. The report therefore examines previous approaches to discipline and argues that policy makers could benefit from a reconsideration of overlooked research and theorizing about discipline in schools. Research based on behaviorism is considered at length, and the paper outlines some principled objections to the use of behaviorism in educational settings. It challenges educators to establish an educational sense of discipline that eschews linear and anti-educational imperatives of control and management, and it describes a project that had students identify the educational needs of 13-15 year olds as a way to encourage educators to expand the number of possible solutions to student problems. The results of a series of interviews with students who left or were pushed out of school are presented here. (Contains approximately 70 references.) (RJM)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED 422 653

# Student Action Research and School Discipline: Consulting the Experts in the Field

[Presented at American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting
San Diego, April 13th, 1998]

Professor Roger Slee
Faculty of Education, University of Western Australia.

## 1. Introduction

The *Sunday Mail* newspaper in the Australian state of Queensland recently reported a 16% increase in the volume of student suspensions and exclusions from 13,374 in 1996 to 15,485 in 1997 (Sunday Mail, 1998; Office for the Minister of Education, 1998). This dramatic increase in suspensions is thrown into relief when compared with the more heavily populated state of Victoria where between 1983 and 1986 total reported suspensions numbered 12,217 (Slee, 1987). The Queensland Department of Education expressed sanguinity over this state of affairs. According to the Minister for Education, Mr Bob Quinn:

> *One of the Coalition's top priorities on coming to office was to restore principals' authority by giving them new powers to suspend misbehaving students for up to 20 school days, or cancel their enrolment altogether where they were persistently disruptive over 15 years of age. We also streamlined the exclusion process and these figures show that our state schools will no longer tolerate that tiny minority of trouble-makers who want to make life difficult for their more conscientious classmates. There's still a long way to go, but we're off to a very good start.*
>
> *(Media Statement, Office of the Minister for Education, 1998: 1)*

The Queensland Teachers' Union vice president reportedly saw the increase in suspensions as a positive trend (Sunday Mail, 1998). Her view resonates with earlier

EA 029 340

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. Slee

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

proclamations of support for tougher government measures by the Queensland Teachers Union.

> *Queensland Teachers Union president Ian Mackie said yesterday the package would help solve discipline problems caused when the cane was outlawed more than two years ago.*
> *"While we have always been opposed to the use of corporal punishment, the removal of it did create a void because it removed the only disciplinary measure teachers had and it was not replaced." Mr Mackie said.*
> *"It took away the only power we had and gave nothing in return."*
>
> *(Courier-Mail, 1996)*

To many, the Queensland Education Department's increasing use of suspension provisions indicates a tough stand on indiscipline and the beginnings of a solution to reportedly growing levels of disruption in schools. This adheres to the policy demeanour of the Queensland government with respect to law and order issues in general. The prison population in that state has more than doubled since 1993. Calls for tougher responses to disruptive students are not restricted to Queensland. In Western Australia, the local media hosted a debate on whether the reintroduction of corporal punishment in schools would provide a panacea for the rising crime rate (Sunday Times, 1998).

Reports from the UK show corresponding increases in the rate of student suspensions and exclusions. The DFE (1995) established that the number of exclusions had been steadily rising throughout the 1990's. Permanent exclusions between 1990 – 1991 and 1991 – 1992 were reported to have increased by 32%, meaning an actual growth from 2,910 students to 3,833 students in one year (DfE, 1993). Parson's (Christ Church College, 1996) study revealed that the number of students permanently excluded from school between September 1995 and July 1996 had reached 13,581 (Parsons and Castle, forthcoming). The dramatic recourse to exclusion has been accompanied by the re-

emergence and steady expansion of off-site centres for excluded students. Echoing Her Majesty's Inspectors in their 1978 report, *Behaviour Units* (Her Majesty's Inspectors, 1978) the DfE (1992) expressed concern that:

- the number of exclusions continued to be escalating;
- the length of exclusions was too long;
- certain minority ethnic group children were disproportionately subject to exclusion;
- due process was not always observed;
- the quality of alternative provision varied significantly; and
- some schools were resorting to exclusion far more frequently than others.

We will return to the significance of these findings later in this paper. What is important to note from the outset is the propensity for education policy-makers, including those based in schools and classrooms, to neglect cumulative research findings in preference for quick-fixes. Previously, these observations about exclusion and off-site referral units had been made by numerous researchers in the UK and elsewhere (Hartford Public Schools, 1975; ACE, 1980; Francis, 1980; Newell, 1980; Basini, 1981; Gold & Mann, 1982; Laslett, 1982; Colliver, 1983; I.L.E.A., 1985; Mongon, 1988; Slee, 1988). Perhaps it is important to rehearse Mongon's (1988:194) suggestion that since the units have been found not to be very helpful to the students who attend them, units are established as a form of social cleansing in schools to protect the students who will never use them.

The move to divest schools of disruptive students is consistent with the Blair Labour government's determination to reassure the electorate of its 'no-nonsense' approach to

disruption in schools. In its White Paper, *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997), the Department for Education and Employment establishes its continuing support for provision outside mainstream schools for pupils with behaviour problems and arrangements for supporting the education of excluded youth (p.57). There is a tension between its one paragraph on the problems of disproportionate exclusions between schools and for ethnic minority children (p.57) and the absence of detailed strategies to counter these trends. In terms of a general approach to disruption in classrooms the DfEE gives its resounding endorsement to Assertive Discipline programmes as established in the Liverpool area by Lee Canter (p.56). Like Australia, behaviourism and essentialising views of defective student pathologies [e.g. ADHD] dominates thinking about approaches to disruption in schools in the UK.

Calls for tougher measures to eliminate disruption in schools are frequently reminiscent in tone. Misty-eyed, those calling for draconian punitive responses to disruption depict a *'golden age'* of schooling when teachers commanded respect, students were unquestioningly obedient and peace reigned in orderly classrooms where students firmly grasped the three 'Rs'. Nostalgia isn't what it was! It tends towards selective amnesia and reductionism. Such is the conceptual slippage that punishment and fear are read off as educational discipline (Slee, 1995). Absent from such reverie is the fact that schools of the past divested themselves of so-called problem students. The unskilled youth labour market concealed both the failure of schools to teach such children, and the disruption they would surely have caused were they to stay on through irrelevant post-

compulsory senior years of secondary schooling which these students knew would make no difference to their vocational outcomes (Polk, 1988).

In this discussion I too want to call on the past in order to consider how we approach student discipline. The educational archaeologist need not dig too deep to reveal potential lessons from research that may help educators and policy-makers in responding to disruption and constructing a more educational, rather than behaviourist, approach to school discipline. This is not an attempt to manufacture tradition or to suggest that schools for the future should persist with a *'curriculum of the dead'* (Ball, 1994). My claim is that educators and education policy-makers could benefit from a reconsideration of too frequently overlooked (Furlong, 1991) past research and theorizing about educational discipline and disruption in schools.

I will also reconsider lessons from an action research project conducted some time ago where students were enlisted as a research team to consider the educational needs of 13 – 15 year olds. Unlike much of the classroom management literature (Glasser, 1969; Canter & Canter, 1976; Charles, 1981; Wolfgang & Glickman, 1986; Glasser, 1987; Rogers, 1990; Fontana, 1994) this is not a 'How To' paper. My aim here is heuristic. My aim is to encourage *'thinking otherwise'* (Ball, 1995), to propose different questions from which to commence our work with young people in schools.

## 2. Attaching Students to a Theory of Discipline: Often Overlooked Theory and Research Reconsidered

Classroom management literature and research, for the most part, proceeds from the intellectual tradition of behaviourism (Skinner, 1972). This genre tends towards considerable conceptual slippage, substitution and reductionism. Discipline is conceptually limited to compliance and the imposition of measures to achieve the sought after behaviour in students by the teacher.

> *Teachers' attempts to prevent, suppress, control, and redirect those behaviors make up the essence of class control, or as it is commonly called, classroom discipline.*
> *(Charles, 1981:4)*

A linguistic sleight of hand, ***discipline*** is substituted for ***control***. As a consequence classroom management research is generally concerned with:

- the form of interactions between teacher and students;
- the arrangement of student groups in the classroom;
- the interactions and dynamics of peer groups;
- the establishment of rules and consequences for rule-breakers;
- reward schemes;
- the consistency of teacher responses; and
- the character of authority conveyed to students.

I do not, in this paper, intend to pursue an extended critique of the application of behaviourism in educational settings. This has been set out in detail elsewhere (Slee, 1995; Freiberg, forthcoming). However, it is necessary to establish some principled objections as a prelude to alternative theoretical tools. Locke (1693:114) drew our attention to the problem that control measures adopted in schools may *'breed an aversion to that which it is the tutor's business to create a liking to'*. Dewey (1916:26) expanded upon this theme to draw out attention to the propensity of control to redirect student

behaviour *'so that henceforth things appeal to him [sic] on the side of trickery and evasion'*. Others, including Arnold (1834, in Findlay, 1897), Spencer (1910) and Gentile (1923) have questioned the authoritarian character of behaviourist control mechanisms in relation to a 'civic education'. As Knight (1985a) and Pearl (1988) have argued schooling provides the too often neglected opportunity for *an apprenticeship in democracy*.

Crittenden (1991), like Knight (1985b) before him considers the relationship between the goals of education and the way in which teachers conceptualise and practice discipline. Many schools' published Prospectuses herald their intention to cultivate independent young people who are able to exercise problem-solving skills, to make decisions and compromises in order to participate responsibly in their democratic community. A cursory glance at the same schools' published Discipline Policy often reveals a list of inflexible rules together with the penalties for the rule breakers. Also central to this issue is the question of consistency between preferred pedagogy and the exercise of control in the classroom. Authoritarianism is in tension with constructivist approaches to teaching and learning (Slee, 1995). Applying his 'sociological imagination' (Wright Mills, 1959), Pearl (1988) reminds us that many of the so-called problems of youth are in fact social problems writ small which should be addressed within the curriculum.

The challenge, for this educator, is to attempt to establish an educational sense of *discipline* that eschews linear and anti-educational imperatives of control and management. To that end, questions of attachment and connection become critical:

- Is there connection between the student and what they doing [the curriculum]?
- Is there connection between the student and how they are learning [pedagogy]?
- Is the student connected to the school community [organisation]?

To interrogate these questions a better equipped 'theoretical toolbox' (Ball, 1994) is required than that of the behaviourist or classroom management technician.

The paradox, it would seem, is that students who are not fully engaged by the life of the school organisation are most at risk of becoming disruptive. These students are predominantly, as Ken Polk (1984) suggested 'the new marginalised youth'. Schools had always failed young people and in days gone by they would have left school early to get started with life in the unskilled labour market. Sociology of schooling (Young, 1971; Apple, 1982; Connell et. al., 1982; Whitty, 1985; Henry et. al., 1988) tells us that this process of failure and disengagement from schooling is neither random nor benign. Social structure is embodied in and reproduced by the social relations, processes and ethos of schooling that are articulated through curriculum, pedagogy and the organisation of schools and classrooms. Accordingly, schooling represents the 'deep structure and grammar of class domination and inequality' (Furlong, 1985:158). Disruption by working class students, for Willis (1977:120-122), was an act of 'ideological penetration' a considered response to the acts of 'symbolic violence' perpetrated through the cultural capital of the curriculum (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). However compelling they are, reproduction and resistance theories (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1977) were 'crude and one-dimensional' (Furlong, 1991), reductive and overly mechanistic (Apple, 1982). Earlier Marxist theorizing tended to romanticize the disruptive behaviour of working

class males (Walker, 1988), simplify the behaviour of teachers, deny agency and ignore the complex multi-dimensionality of the 'person' and their interactions in schools (Connell et. al., 1982:188). For Connell and his colleagues (1982:188) while cultural capital is 'not entirely absurd', it 'exaggerates a good insight'.

In *Gender and Power*, Bob Connell (1987:193-194) asserted that '*... two forms of occupational blindness – the inability of sociologists to recognise the complexities of the person and the unwillingness of psychologists to recognise the dimension of social power*' produces a weakness in much academic research. Following Connell, Furlong (1991) uses this statement to suggest a 'sociology of emotion' to understand the phenomenology of disruption in schools. He argues that most sociologies of disruption assume or imply a process whereby students 'logically and rationally appraise the situation they are in and then devise an appropriate strategy whether that be deviance or conformity' (p.296). Such an assumption is far too simplistic for explaining the rejection of schooling by some young people. Students' stories themselves may present such a view, he contends, but this too is but part of the story. He argues that through the matrix of interactions between students and schools 'hidden injuries' are caused which contribute to the kinds of behaviours that produce trouble in school.

Retaining a structuralist narrative Furlong (1991) offers three educational structures in schools that contribute to students' emotional state. These are:

- *The production of ability*
- *The production of values*

- *The production of occupational identity*

By tracing the way in which schools produce and sanction specific forms of ability we can observe the way in which students evaluate themselves in relation to the conventions of ability. Benchmarks are provided through I.Q., assessment, grouping and streaming against which students self-prognosticate. This will have deep implications for their emotional state. Likewise a student will have to situate him or herself in relation to the official values of the school and also in terms of where school locates that student in relation to occupational choices. In this context we can observe the way in which different cultural groups and identities are marginalised by the official value structure of the school. A specific example of this in Australia is manifest in differences between European and traditional Aboriginal educational values. Where competition and particular forms of address are central to the European academic tradition, it is anathema to Aboriginal edcational practice (Partington, 1998; Malcolm, 1998).

This analysis can further be applied to broader questions of the politics of identity and difference in schools (Slee, 1997). Researching and theorizing gender and education has contributed to particular insights into girls' disruptive behaviour in schools (Davies, 1984; Alder, 1988; Wolpe, 1988; Robinson, 1991). And, more recently to the formation and implications of masculinities and sexualities as they articulate or clash with the sponsored identities within the structures of schooling (Mac an Ghaill, 1988 & 1994; Sewell, 1997).

Schools are riven with tensions and contradictions for young people. They are offered recognition, approval and hope on the one hand, only to have it replaced with failure, disapproval and exclusion by the other (p.305). Students will display emotional outbursts and distress which may be compounded by or emanate from other sources of distress in the family or other associations outside of the school. Furlong's analysis is not an attempt to individualise the problem of disruption to isolated students' emotional outbursts. On the contrary he is suggesting that educators need to deal with both the problem of the distress that is symptomatic of students' hidden injuries and also recognise and deal with the structural determinants of disruption in schools.

Returning to our earlier definition of discipline as the connection or engagement of the learner to schooling, it would appear that those on the margins are pushed further away by the technologies of control applied by schools and education authorities. Wyn and White's (1997:123-124) observation of the general processes of social exclusion for young people is apposite:

> *Some groups of young people are in increasing numbers being disenfranchised from the major institutions and material benefits of consumer society. In particular, they are being subjected to the dual processes of* ***disconnection*** *from institutions revolving around production, consumption and community life, and the social and psychological experiences of* ***disempowerment*** *accompanying this disconnection.*

The material life that young people are supposed to aspire to isn't reachable and the alternative they construct for themselves is 'unacceptable'. Welfare provision is 'restrictive and intrusive' and becomes a negative and damaging experience for many young people.

> *State intervention in the lives of young people is extensive (through a wide range of welfare, education and criminal justice institutions); intensive (through increasingly intrusive measures*

*designed to control youth activity); and contingent (through use of a range of positive and negative incentives to guide youth behaviour).*

*(Wyn and White, 1997 134)*

The institutional life of schools replicates the processes of disengagement and disempowerment. The largely undemocratic governance of schools intensifies the conflict in schools. Students who are unable to achieve academic success through the established curriculum frameworks and preferred approaches to teaching and learning have limited opportunities to exhibit value to the school and typically lack a forum for the legitimate expression of their dissent.

Education policy suggests that the production of student disengagement and disruption will intensify rather than diminish. In the UK, education policy imperatives are towards the narrowing of curriculum and the restriction of teaching and learning to traditional forms of didacticism (Slee, Weiner & Tomlinson, 1998). The regulatory mechanism of the educational markets (Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe, 1995) and supported by Ofsted surveillance through inspection and the public panopticon of published League Tables of schools' performance have not produced promised choice, diversity and quality. Failure is endemic and vilification rife. In this climate schools are far more selective of students in order to guarantee purchase on higher positions on the League Tables. Exclusion, as we have seen from the department for Education and Employment data, produces a tiered system of schooling where selective Grammars are places of traditional orderly learning and local Comprehensives struggle with their 'failing' communities. This form of

intensification of regulation and surveillance may generate a favoured political discourse, but it has little capacity to engage disconnected and disempowered students.

### 3. Challenging the Centrifuge – Hearing Student Voices.

In order to ask the question, 'how might schools be other than centrifuges?' I will describe a research project that aimed to have students identify the educational needs of 13 – 15 year olds. This project is dated. This narrative relies on reports, field notes and the infidelity of my own interpretation and reconstruction of events. Accepting this as problematic I offer this not as a manual for future research, but as a prompt for more robust interrogations of what was attempted and achieved.

First, this was not intended as an exercise in ventriloquism. The aim of the project was to find ways of hearing, registering and bringing student voices into educational decision making forums. Gitlin and Russell (1994: 185 -187) are amongst a growing body of researchers who are interrogating the power relations of the research process and the politics of the representation of the research subjects' voices. I claim little originality in the co-ordination of this project. The research draws from what had established itself as a tradition of youth action research in the Australia (Holdsworth, 1988: 298):

> *At a statewide level, students have carried out research on vandalism for the Premier's Task Force on Vandalism (Knight & Dawes, 1982), on truancy for the Victorian Institute of Secondary Education (Coventry, 1983), for the Ministry of Transport on the use of railway stations (Wilson and Wyn, 1984) and on student participation itself for the Ministerial Working Party on Student Participation (Van Halen, 1986).*

Consequently, when I was commissioned to investigate the educational needs of 13 – 15 year olds it was instinctive that the research enlist students as the research team. Many less than youthful academics have provided lucid, authoritative, yet 'one step removed' commentary on the needs of young people. There seemed little point to add to this body of work. The commissioning agency was a welfare organisation in the inner metropolitan suburbs of Melbourne. They had established a behaviour unit for students who were being ejected from local secondary schools. As part of the evaluation of the unit I was asked to provide them with a report on the educational needs of 13 - –5 year olds in the inner suburbs.

The research drew heavily from the experience of Knight's Vandalism Task Force and Coventry's student research on truancy. The first step was to approach the secondary schools in the area to form a team of young researchers. To this end I was able to engage a Year 11 social studies class for one semester and a number of Year 11 students from a neighbouring school. The students were told of the project's aims:

- To identify the educational needs of 13 – 15 year olds
- To have students design, conduct and report the research in order to present a more authentic student articulation of these educational needs.

A research team was formed comprising 15 students. An advisory panel was formed to guide the project and respond to progress reports.

The research team was taken out of the school for two days to commence the process of designing the research. The two-day workshop was conducted in the boardroom of the

Education Faculty at Melbourne University. The sessions were divided between considerations of what constituted the educational needs of young people and ways of investigating the issues they raised. Hypothetical research questions were put to the group to see how they might go about doing the research. Returning to school the students used their social studies classes to design a survey instrument and determined a cross – schools cohort and a small trial cohort to test their questionnaire. Students from the neighbouring school had arranged to join these classes for the duration of the project. Both schools had agreed to count the students' work in their final grades. Even at this stage the project was testimony to the ability of schools to be flexible.

The questionnaire was produced, conducted with a trial group and then refined after discussion in the next class. Students were encouraged to think about the form of the questions, the numbers of questions and more creative ways of encouraging respondents to engage with the survey. In the survey, the students set two research foci:

- School and work [which considered curriculum and pedagogy and connection with occupational destinations]; and
- School climate [which incorporated school organisation and governance, welfare and 'happiness factors' and student behaviour].

The questionnaires were then conducted with 10 students randomly selected by the class teachers in each of the focus years 7, 8, 9 and 10 in the 3 secondary schools (N = 120). The research team then set upon the arduous tasks of collating and interpreting their data. [see Table 1] During the discussions of the data students suggested that we were actually

talking to the wrong people. If we really wanted to get a more telling picture of the educational needs of young people we ought to be talking to people who have left or been pushed out of school. To this end I met with youth workers at the local youth service centre and then arranged for myself a some of the research team to talk with a group of young people who came to the centre during the day time. [see Table 2]

### 3.1 Research Findings

**Table 1 The Educational Needs of 13 – 15 Year Olds Survey Findings**

*1. CURRICULUM*

- All three schools provided a comprehensive range of subjects but noted gaps in computer skills and information technology, human relationships and personal development education, work skills education.
- Most important subjects were agreed to be mathematics and English.
- Least important subjects were listed as science, physical education and creative arts.
- Students in lower secondary saw science as useful and interesting, but came to see it as less important soon after the first year of secondary school.
- The majority of respondents found difficulty in seeing the connection between school subjects and the world outside school. Little connection was seen between potential occupations and school subjects.

*2. TEACHING AND LEARNING*

- Teachers were often remote and appeared disinterested in their students.
- Many students commented on the limited teaching approaches employed by teachers.
- Asking for explanation is embarrassing to most students, it often results in verbatim repetition of prior explanation - 'slowly and loudly'!
- Too little variety in teaching and learning.

3. *SCHOOL CLIMATE*

- Students reported detachment from decision-making, calling for student rights, due process and opportunities for appeal.
- Timetable was inflexible.
- Improvements were called for in the physical organisation of schools to create specific year level spaces.
- A need for more counselling and support services within school to help with increasing levels of student stress was expressed.
- Girls reported receiving as good a deal from school as boys. But closer analysis of their responses showed greater levels of dissatisfaction with school.
- Students wanted to contribute to the formulation of rules and consequences.
- More extra-curricular activities were called for.

**Table 2 Outsiders' Perceptions of their Schooling**

- Access to information about financial assistance for impoverished students is scant within schools.
- If such assistance is arranged it does not meet the needs of families seeking to extend their children's participation in schooling.
- Disciplinary procedures lead to exclusion rather than redemption.
- Disciplinary processes lead to 'fat files' and teachers circulating low expectations of students.
- Inflexibility on the part of the school led to students who were absent from school being more permanently excluded. Young people talked of schools not understanding their need to provide support and assistance with siblings or parents in the family home.
- Families felt unwelcome in the school.
- Curriculum lacked connection to students' lives or to viable work destinations.
- Limited support exists in schools for students in crisis.
- Schools have not considered the plausibility of part time attendance for some students.
- Schools did not properly consider serious problems such as drug abuse, poverty, homelessness, hunger or family crisis which disrupt the lives of many young people.
- Schools do not establish a climate of acceptance of students in difficult or different circumstances.
- Racism is not seriously tackled in schools.
- Remedial education is humiliating.
- A creche should be provided by schools.
- Teachers are often remote.
- Too little time is given to explaining work missed or not understood by students.

### 3.2 Research Outcomes

Just as significant as the findings were a series of outcomes of the research process. I had been told to expect some levels of resistance and 'testing' by the students as they were a difficult group. This did not eventuate. Participation was voluntary and only one student left the project. The class teacher expressed great pleasure at the level of application of the students who exceeded expectations in working on the report.

The students asked early what was in it for them and I suggested that their findings might influence school improvement and education policy. To that end we arranged for them to present their findings and the report to members of the Senior Executive of the Victorian Ministry of Education. From there they were invited to present their work to a State

Board of Education professional development forum and to the Faculty of Education at Melbourne University.

Members of staff at the schools that were involved in the research were impressed and school administrators presented the work to staff meetings. The project illustrated that though the logistics were awkward, flexible learning programmes were possible in traditional academic high schools. It also challenged the notion of different work implying a diminution in standards.

Student teachers from another university were engaged to evaluate and film the project throughout its life. Their work was incorporated into their assessment schedules and they were able to provide rich commentary on research perceptions and method to the coordinator of the project and the teachers involved. The project provided them with a unique opportunity to confront complex questions about pedagogy, curriculum and school organisation and to engage in extended conversations with students quite apart from the usual practicum experience.

**4. Some Elementary Lessons From Student Researchers.**

Notwithstanding the progress of qualitative research methodology (Alder and Sandor, 1990) this research experience provides further testimony to the value of engaging students in 'real work' and providing different learning environments and experiences. It would seem that these are often overlooked lessons in pedagogy and curriculum. Students' considered responses to questions about school climate and discipline provide

powerful endorsement of the need for schools to promote greater levels of student participation in decision-making and to ensure that this is not simply tokenistic.

The critical factors of curriculum and pedagogy are seen by many students as problematic and therefore compromise student attachment to the academic life of school. Behaviour management scripts offer little support in tackling these questions adequately. The degree to which students see schools as useful to their future is brought into doubt. While we, as educators, may be able to explain the connection and feel confident that it does exist, the perception that it doesn't provides the potential for serious levels of disruption.

Simply put, the efforts of education departments might better be expended in attending to critical questions of the processes, structures and outcomes of schooling as a response to perceived increases in disruption. The cost of exclusion is actually and potentially, when we compute policing, criminal justice, health and welfare bills, far greater than the benefits accrued from better resourced schools which are able to provide more flexible and comprehensive programmes of study for students in better physical environments (Parsons and Castle, forthcoming). Disruption may either be seen as a threat or an important set of messages about the experience of schooling that it's not worth executing the messengers for.

**References**

Advisory Centre for Education [ACE] (1980) Disruptive Units, *Where*, No. 158:6-7.

Alder, C. (1988) Girls, Schooling and Trouble, in R. Slee (Ed.) *Discipline and Schools: A Curriculum Perspective*, Melbourne, Macmillan.

Alder, C. and Sandor, D. (1990) Youth Researching Youth, *Youth Studies*, Vol.9, No.4:38-42.

Apple, M. (1982) *Education and Power*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Ball, S.J. (1994) *Education Reform: A critical and post-structural approach*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

Ball, S.J. (1995) Intellectuals or Technicians? The Urgent Role of Theory in Educational Studies, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol.XXXXIII, No. 3: 255 – 271.

Basini, A. (1981) Urban Schools and Disruptive Pupils: A study of some ILEA support units, *Educational Review*, Vol. 33, No.3: 191 – 206.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J. (1977) *reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, London, Sage.

Bowles, S. and Gintis, H. (1976) *Schooling in Capitalist America*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Canter, L. & Canter, M. (1976) *Assertive Discipline: A Take Charge Approach for Today's Educator*, California, Canter and Associates.

Charles, C.M. (1981) *Building Classroom Discipline (3rd edition)*, New York, Longman.

Christ Church College (1996) *Final Report on Follow-up Survey of Permanent Exclsuions from Schools in England*, Canterbury, Christ Church College.

Colliver, R. (1983) *Severely Disruptive Behaviour in Secondary Schools: A Review of Causes and School Responses*, Perth, Education department of Western Australia.

Connell, R.W., Ashenden, D., Kessler, S. and Dowsett, G. (1982) *Making the Difference: Schools, families and social division*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin.

Connell, R.W. (1987) *Gender and Power*, London, George Allen & Unwin.

Courier Mail (1996) *Cabinet Targets Unruly Students*, 3rd June, Brisbane.

Coventry, G. (1983) Student Researchers in Action, *AdVISE*, No.44.

Daines, R. (1981) Withdrawal Units and the Psychology of Problem Behaviour, in B. Gillham (ed.) *Problem Behaviour in the Secondary School*, London, Croom Helm.

Davies, L. (1984) *Pupil Power: Deviance and Gender in School*, Lewes, Falmer Press.

Department for Education (1992) *Exclusion: A discussion paper*, London, DfE.

Department for Education (1993) *A New Deal for 'Out of School' Pupils*, press release 126/93, London, DfE.

Department for Education (1995) *National Survey of Local Education Authorities' Policies and Procedures for the Identification of, and Provision for, Children who are Out of School by Reason of exclusion or Otherwise*, London, DfE.

Department for Education and Employment (1997) *Excellence in Schools*, London, The Stationery Office.

Dewey, J. (1916) *Democracy and Education*, New York, The Free Press.

Findlay, J.J. (ed.) (1897) *Arnold of Rugby: His Life and Contributions to Education*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Fontana, D. (1994) *Managing Classroom Behaviour (2nd edition)*, Leicester, The British Psychological Society.

Francis, M. (1980) Disruptive Units: Labelling a New Generation, *Where*, 158:12-14.

Freiberg, J. (ed.) (forthcoming) *Beyond Behaviorism: Changing the Classroom Management Paradigm*, New York, Allyn & Bacon.

Furlong, V.J. (1985) *The Deviant Pupil*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press.

Furlong, V.J. (1991) Disaffected pupils: Reconstructing the sociological perspective, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol.12, No.3: 293-307.

Gitlin, A. and Russell, R. (1994) Alternative Methodologies and the Research Context, in A. Gitlin (Ed.) *Power and Method: Political Activism and Educational Research*, New York, Routledge.

Gentile, G. (1923) *The Reform of Education* (trans. Benedetto Croce), London, Benn Brothers.

Gewirtz, S., Ball, S.J. and Bowe, R. (1995) *Markets, Choice and Equity in Education*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

Glasser, W. (1969) *Schools Without Failure*, New York, Harper and Row.

Glasser, W. (1987) *Control Theory in the Classroom*, New York, Harper and Row.

Gold, M. & Mann, D.W. (1982) Alternative schools for troublesome secondary students, *The Urban Review*, Vol.14, No.4: 305-316.

Hartford Public Schools (1975) *Alternative Schools 1973 – 1974: An Evaluation Report*, Hartford, Conn., Hartford Public Schools Authority.

Holdsworth, R. (1988) Student Participation Projects in Australia: an anecdotal history, in R. Slee (ed.) *Discipline and Schools: A Curriculum Perspective*, Melbourne, Macmillan.

Inner London Education Authority [ILEA] (1985) *Off-Site Support Centres*, Committee Paper 5042, London, ILEA.

Knight, T. and Dawes, B. (1982) *Youth Advocacy Report: A Student Initiated Project*, Melbourne, Vandalism Task Force.

Knight, T. (1985a) An Apprenticeship in Democracy, *The Australian Teacher*, Number 11, February, pp. 5-7.

Knight, T. (1995b) Schools and Delinquency, in A. Borowski and J. Murray (eds.) *Juvenile Delinquency in Australia*, Sydney, Methuen.

Laslett, R. (1982) Leavers from three residential schools for maladjusted children, *Educational Review*, Vol.34, No.2: 127 – 137.

Locke, J. (1693) *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, (Ed. F.W. Garforth, 1964), London, Heinemann.

Mac an Ghaill (1988) *Young, Gifted and Black*, Milton Keynes, the Open University Press.

Mac an Ghaill, M. (1994) *The Making of Men*, Buckingham, The Open University Press.

Mongon, D. (1988) Behaviour units, 'maladjustment' and student control, in R. Slee (ed.) *Discipline and Schools: A Curriculum Perspective*, Melbourne, Macmillan.

Newell, P. (1980) Sin Bins: The Integration Argument, *Where*, 160:8-11.

Office of the Minister for Education (1998) *Principals Embrace New School Discipline Powers, Media Statement*, 15th March, Brisbane, Queensland Government.

Parsons, C. and Castle, F. (forthcoming) The Cost of School Exclusion, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*.

Partington, G. (ed.) (1998) *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*, Katoomba, Social Science Press.

Pearl, A. (1988) The Requirements for a Democratic Education, in R. Slee (ed.) *Discipline and Schools: A curriculum perspective*, Melbourne, Macmillan.

Polk, K. (1984) The New Marginal Youth, *Crime and Delinquency*, Vol.30: 462 – 480.

Polk, K. (1988) Education, youth unemployment and student resistance, in R.Slee (ed.) *Discipline and Schools: A Curriculum Perspective*, Melbourne, Macmillan.

Robinson, K. (1992) Classroom Discipline: Power, Resistance and Gender. A Look at Teacher Perspectives, *Gender and Education*, Vol.4, No.3: 273 – 287.

Rogers, B. (1990) *You Know the Fair Rule*, Hawthorn, Australian Council for educational Research.

Sewell, T. (1997) *Black Masculinities and Schooling: How Black Boys Survive Modern Schooling*, Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham Books.

Skinner, B.F. (1972) *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, London, Jonathan Cape.

Slee, R. (1995) *Changing Theories and Practices of Discipline*, London, Falmer Press.

Slee, R., Weiner, G. & Tomlinson, S. (1998) *School Effectiveness Research for Whom?*, London, Falmer Press.

Spencer, H. (1910) *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical*, London, Williams and Norgate.

Sunday Mail (1998) *School's Out For Misfits*, 15th March, Brisbane.

Van Halen, B. (1986) The student research team: A state-wide subject, *Connect*, No.19.

Walker, J. (1988) *Louts and Legends*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin.

Whitty, G. (1985) *Sociology and School Knowledge: Curriculum Theory, Research and Politics*, London, Methuen.

Willis, P. (1977) *Learning to Labour*, Westmead, Saxon House.

Wilson, B. and Wyn, J. (1984) *Youth Action Teams and the Multipurpose Use of Railway Stations – An Overview*, Parkville, Melbourne College of Advanced Education.

Wolfgang, C.H. and Glickman, C.D. (1986) *Solving Discipline Problems*, Newton, Mass., Allyn and Bacon.

Wolpie, A. (1988) *Within School Walls*, London, Routledge.

Wright Mills, C. (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*, New York, Oxford University Press.

Wyn, J. and White, R. (1997) *Rethinking Youth*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin.

Young, M.F.D. (Ed.) (1971) *Knowledge and Control: New Directions for the Sociology of Education*, London, Collier Macmillan.